

ANCHORING MADE EASY



by Alex and Daria Blackwell

“Anchoring Made Easy” was to have been the title of our anchoring book, had the publisher with whom we wanted to work had his way. Instead we named it “Happy Hooking – the Art of Anchoring,” as hooking your boat to the bottom in a lovely spot should always be fun and easy. Sadly, there are still some people out there who are clearly not having fun when they try to set their hook. We suppose they have not read the book – and their boat may not necessarily always stay put either.

As our cruising takes us ever further afield, and we check the cruising guide for the anchorage in the harbor we would like to visit next, we often see statements like “anchorage marked on the chart has poor holding.” I write this as we are (very securely) anchored just below a picturesque castle in a beautiful bay on the west coast of Ireland. Once again the guide notes that this spot has poor holding. It’s at this point that it occurs to us that perhaps it was not the bottom that provided questionable holding but rather the anchor being used when the observation was made that was at fault.

As anchoring is perhaps the single most important part of boating, any mention of anchoring or gear preferences in the company of sailors is always sure to stir up a storm of commentary from all sides – even from people who may only rarely leave the dock. So when word of Quickline’s introduction of the Turkish manufactured Ultra Anchor to the US marketplace trickled into our consciousness, we just had to take a closer look.

Long proponents of what some people term as modern generation anchors, we have several older pieces

of hardware decorating our front lawn. These include a huge Luke (fisherman-type), a smaller and very elegant collapsible fisherman, a massive CQR and a well-used Delta (maybe we should start a museum of anchoring). Had we any of the other types of anchors designed to plow, claw or drag through the bottom, these too would have become ornaments. As an old saying goes, “The plow was a great invention until some eejit made an anchor out of it.”

With the sole exception of the Fortress anchor which weighs very little and holds so very well in a soft bottom, we now use only spade-type anchors. For several years we have had unconditional success with a Rocna finding it sets extraordinarily well in virtually all types of bottom. The Ultra shares some characteristics with the Rocna, but it lacks the roll bar and has a lead weighted tip.

The Ultra also has some interesting sounding features. The shaft is apparently hollow, which is supposed to help orient the anchor as it drops to the bottom. This claim is similar to the Hydrobubble, which sports a float and is one of the more interesting looking of the modern anchors. Perhaps the hollow shaft of the Ultra will indeed orient the anchor on an all rope rode, but with our all chain rode we have watched it land randomly, often upside down, on the sea floor. It is quite easy to watch the anchor drop as the water here is crystal clear. But read on, for this random orientation does not appear to get in its way.

Another elegant feature is the downward curved tip, which is said to facilitate a more rapid set – and

set rapidly it does. The first time we dropped it was in a very tight harbor with rocks and cliffs on all sides. I watched as it went down and landed upside down – not quite as advertised. Bearing in mind that we always plan for contingencies and this was its very first test, I alerted Daria via Motorola walkie-talkie, and told her to stand by for a possible anchor change. It was blowing quite hard and the boat started to drift back. I could hardly believe my eyes as I watched the shiny stainless steel anchor flip over, catch the gleam of sunlight through the aqua water, and with virtually no scope disappear instantly into the hard sandy bottom. This was just like the videos we have all seen promoting the newer anchors. I let out some more rode while Daria slowly backed down. When I hit the brake on the windlass the boat came to a shuddering halt – we were hooked! Hey, perhaps anchoring really has been made easy these days.

Proponents of the Ultra anchor state that the lack of a roll bar, an important feature of the Buegel, Rocna and Manson Supreme anchors, will help it go deeper. They claim that the roll bar impedes the competition from digging below the surface – something which our experience does not necessarily corroborate. It does, however, make the anchor easier and more streamlined to stow on the bow roller. Instead of the roll bar, Quickline has added a “non foul chain bar” to stop the rode from wrapping around the Ultra anchor shaft when tossed overboard. However, readers of our book (*Happy Hooking – the Art of Anchoring*) will know better than simply tossing their anchor and rode overboard. Any way you cut it, tossing an anchor haphazardly overboard is simply not a good idea.

We have now been using the Ultra for several months and besides looking very pretty on our bow, it has rapidly and justifiably advanced into the cadre of modern anchors we can and will recommend. If sized and used correctly it sets quickly, digs deeply, and holds well. In a couple of nasty squalls with sharp wind direction changes, the anchor simply dug deeper. In one sustained night of near gale force winds, we didn't budge an inch. Just like the Rocna, it likes to dig deep and will bring up loads of



sediment (mud, etc.) when you weigh anchor. So, as with the other spade-type anchors, we would recommend using it with a windlass and a wash down pump.

About the only suggestion we would have for the manufacturer is to expand the relatively small hole for the shackle in the Quickset Ultra to a small slot like that in the Rocna so that one can easily get a shackle through it. Yes, we know that there is a suggestion to use it with a swivel, but we are not in favor of swivels as in our opinion, corroborated by colleagues' experiences, they add another opportunity for a potential weak link. On that note, we are also not supporters of a long slot as on the Manson Supreme. In a 180-degree wind shift this could conceivably cause the anchor to be pulled out of the bottom – just as if you were employing a trip line.

Many manufacturers offer stainless steel anchors as most any boater loves shiny gear on deck. The Ultra, which is only available in high grade 316 stainless steel, is also “hand crafted” and it is undeniably beautiful to behold. It is certainly, however, more than a lovely piece of jewelry to add to your foredeck; it appears to be as reliable as it is beautiful and we look forward to independent tests validating our experience in the near future. We're convinced that it's the real thing with a touch of bling! And with a lifetime warranty, you may never need another anchor as long as your boat shall live. ⚓



The Rocna shackle attachment



The Ultra shackle attachment